

BAILIE ISLES,

BLAIRGOWRIE.



Mr. Jas. Isles.

A HUMOROUS FELLOW.

XXIX.

BAILIE ISLES,

BLAIRGOWRIE.

Excellent! Why, this is the best fooling when all is done.
—TWELFTH NIGHT.

Bailie Isles, although a comparatively young man, has been before the public now for many years, and his claims to notice are various. Most important of course is his antiquarian treasures, which comprise one of the best collections in Perthshire; but there is no doubt that his musical and social qualities, his bonhomie as Chairman and otherwise, his ability to sing a good song and tell a good story, and his readiness to identify himself with a popular cause bulk more largely in the imagination of the public. The latter like amusement, and they are never balked when their favourite Bailie undertakes to supply it—in one form or another. Recently he has taken a leading part in the opposition to the Town Council's Wellmeadow scheme, and first-class entertainment may yet be looked for in that connection; the Bailie is in dead earnest, which is always a guarantee of good comedy business. One great advantage our friend has, in addition to his other qualifications as a popular leader, over many of his opponents is his being a "Blair boy." His father, James Isles, was a highly-esteemed wine merchant in High Street, and it was in his shop

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that, first as assistant and later on as successor, he got his ideas of the business he was to carry out in after life. The late Mr John Inch and Mr Peter Sturrock were responsible for his early education, and not

A FEW GOOD STORIES

are connected with the "young barbarians" of that period. Our friend, however, was quite a model boy; it will interest his many friends to learn that he once carried off first prize for good conduct and Bible knowledge. Old Peter Sturrock was a great believer in the tawse and other persuasive agencies, and the boys, as might be supposed, tried to get even with him on every occasion. The result was ructions on a large scale sometimes. One of these took place on a certain morning when the fail-me-never needle had been carefully fixed with the business end up in the master's chair, down upon which he dropped in leisurely fashion to take his usual peep at the morning paper. It was in the dead of winter, but if ever there was an early spring it followed one second thereafter, with a sudden rise in the temperature to blood-heat and boiling-over point in no time—every boy in the school reaping the benefit thereof. Volcanic eruptions were of frequent occurrence in that school, but this is not a treatise on seismology. Another schoolboy story shows us Jamie Isles and three other youngsters down the Ericht fishing, and one of the latter accidentally whipping his hook in the throat of the former. What a fix! The boys did not see how to get the hook out, and never thought of cutting the line, so the four miserable young beggars marched solemnly up the river side and through the town. one on each side of our friend,

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and the other carefully balancing the rod over his head behind. It would have taken a Du Maurier to do justice to the appearance of the quartette when they reached Dr Lunan's surgery door, and tried to get in with the rod and the line and the hook in the greetin' fish and the two supporters, gules, all in order arranged as aforesaid; then the doctor himself appearing, cutting the line and pulling out the hook reverse way, to the astonishment and delight of everybody. Antiquarian tastes may run in the blood, apparently, for Mr Isles, senior, bequeathed a fair collection of curios to his son, who has taken up the running to such purpose that it would require a respectable pamphlet to do justice to his belongings in this line. The collection embraces a large number of prehistoric, Roman, and ancient Scottish relics, MSS., &c., to a considerable extent local, but including many items from other parts of the country and elsewhere. He is an F.S.A. (Scot.), a member of the new Spalding Club, &c., and, it may be added, is only too pleased to show his treasures by pre-arrangement to any enthusiasts like himself. In 1876 our friend entered the Police Commission, and was made Bailie in 1882, retiring in 1885. 'Aince a Bailie aye a Bailie,' however, holds good in Blairgowrie if anywhere. He is also a J.P., and thereon hangs a tale. It will be recalled that just before the election in 1889 Mr J. W. Carew, M.P. for Kildare, was accused of uttering speeches inciting to unlawful acts, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. He came north and spoke at one of Sir John Kinloch's meetings at Blairgowrie. The warrant followed him up, but had to be endorsed by a Perthshire J.P., and it was our friend's destiny to have his beauty-sleep broken in upon to perform that

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function. For the terrible wiggling he got in the House of Commons afterwards for his share in the business he meekly murmurs, "Virtue is its own reward," and consoles his chastened spirit with the knowledge that at least a score of admiring and solicitous fair ones are each of them happy in the possession—how could he deny them?—of the identical pen which he used on that historic occasion! With other good points the Bailie is distinctly musical, and is one of the "three B.'s"—

Three Bailies in two famous counties born—
Forfar and Perth—Blairgowrie did adorn:
The first, in loftiness of thought surpassed,
The next in wit, in melody the last.

Blair has already produced one world-famous tenor in Durward Lely; it is no exaggeration to say that Nature would have required little coaxing to produce another in the third "B." above had he chosen to undergo the process. His "My Pretty Jane," "Sally in our Alley," "Tom Bowling," and many more such never fail to please his audiences—sympathetic voice, perfect ear and taste being supplemented with that incommunicable something without which the other qualities count for little. He is one of the oldest members of the Choral Society—it is 33 years since he first sang alto in its ranks. Since then he has undertaken the tenor solos at many of the Society's concerts, and otherwise furthered its prosperity. He has been President for a considerable number of years past. Musical relations have produced many of his most amusing experiences. One of the earliest was at a concert at Meiklour, when a noisy character at the back of the hall was causing frequent interruption. Our vocalist stopped short in the middle of

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his song and threw down the gauntlet in these terms, "If that fellow over there will go outside for ten minutes I'll settle with him afterwards."

"That fellow" went out right enough, but the hanged thing was that he kept bawling through the key-hole every now and then, "Is that deevil no oomin' oot yet?" Here's a good religious story with a nice moral. On one occasion the Bailie was staying at a hotel in the north where there happened to be a clergyman who was not only a good preacher, as it transpired, but a splendid hand at "nap." His manner was "childlike and bland." The cool, business, methodical way in which he scooped in all the loose shekels lying about and entered his winnings in his notebook was really very tiring to the circle of wretches who had thought they had a tame pigeon to pluck. They gave up playing in disgust. After totting up his little book his reverence dropped the remark that they had been helping forward a good cause, although they didn't know it. "£2 12s 6d is not a bad contribution to our Smaller Livings Scheme!" "Your what?" exclaimed the chorus. "Our Smaller Livings Scheme. For sharpening up one's play, gentlemen, there's nothing like having one of the schemes of the Church in view. Just you try it!" Well, they didn't just there and then all take solemn oath they would follow his advice, but did the next best thing to it, for, on the suggestion of our Blairgowrie vocalist, a concert was organised, and brought in a further acceptable sum towards that S.L.S., much to the gratification of its zealous advocate. Once, when among the London Scottish at Wimbledon as a Captain, he was called upon for a song, mounted a platform accordingly, and was in the middle of "We'll hae nane but Hieland bonnets

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here," when forward came a stalwart policeman, ordered him to desist, threatened to report him, &c., &c., all in true official style. The vocalist was reassured, however, when the guardian of the peace "teugged" his tunic in passing, with a stage whisper, "Gae on, gae on; ye're daein' fine; never min' me!" It turned out he was a Perthshire man. On another occasion he was the guest of a gentleman in London, and it was suddenly arranged that the Bailie should do the

"NOBLEMAN IN DISGUISE"

street singer business. A young lady offered to accompany him, so the two sallied forth, chose a likely spot, and Signor Islesi started off with "My Pretty Jane," followed with "When Other Lips," "Thy Voice is Near Me," &c. An old lady made an encouraging start with a three-penny bit. A gentleman passing tendered sixpence, "spotted" the joke, and invited the couple to tea. A large crowd gathered, windows were thrown up in the neighbourhood, and coin came in freely. An old gent. dropped a florin in the lady's palm, asking "When Other Lips" again. Result—another florin and an invitation to his house to sing, and be duly paid for it. That didn't suit their programme, however, but the two gentlemen exchanged cards in regular dramatic style, and the adventurous couple passed on to fields and pastures new. There another dear old lady gave them a 1d to sing "My Jane," and stood wiping her eyes during the performance—whether on account of the song or the singer is an open question. A shilling was sent out from a grand house; thereupon, from the one opposite—jealous lot, evidently—issued a gorgeous butler with a sixpence and a polite request to "move on!" Our

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lady friend, who had been money-taker all the time, happening to show her gloved hand, the fellow as he retired was heard muttering something about the "bloomin' cheek of those 'ere society street singers!" and the parties thus apostrophised could not help laughing outright. The net result to a certain charity of a couple of hours' amusement was just as many pounds. Besides being something of an actor also—as witness his "Tattie Roup" and "Political Meeting"—he is a bit of an artist. At least, he used to be when the late William Geddes, famous for his fish and genre pictures, was alive. It hasn't the slightest connection with the present subject, but somehow the story crops up of the late Duke of Edinburgh and Sir Arthur Sullivan—musical pupil and tutor respectively—to the effect that on one occasion the Duke declared he would set certain words to music "as soon as Sir Arthur Sullivan returned from the Continent." Touching our friend, however, qua artist. He once made a beautiful painting of the six Druidical Stones on the Essendy Road, known locally simply as the "Standing Stanes." This chef d'oeuvre he exhibited to all his friends for

THEIR CANDID APPROVAL,

which they gave with greatest readiness, never one of them asking any unpleasant questions. When he showed it to Geddes, however, that artist took a long, fond look at it from several points of view, turned it upside down, went through the same process, and finally returned it to its original position. "Not a bad thing that, Isles," said he at last, "but you should have put a boat in it." "A what?" exclaimed the painter of pictures; "what the mischief do you want with

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a boat at the Standing Stanes?" "Great Scott!" exclaimed the other artist, dropping his pipe, "I thought it was Marlee Loch!" After which date our friend always saw that his pictures were properly labelled. But, whatever happens, and after all is said and done, when the Bailie plays up to his best he is accepted everywhere as a "jolly, good fellow," and can always take good-natured chaff in the same spirit in which it is given—no one better. To him all apologies and condolences.